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## A Risk That Cost Two Lives

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man from Webster City said a company could be raised if one of our party would go with him. Wheelock went and they began recruiting about midnight. In the afternoon of the third day, more than one hundred men were enrolled, organized, provisioned, armed and equipped, and left Fort Dodge for the settlement. Without preparation, without question as to the authority of their officer, without any call from the officials of State or nation, these noble men took their guns and went out to perform a duty incumbent upon them as men, as citizens, and under a higher obligation to the Lord of hosts.

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### A RISK THAT COST TWO LIVES.

BY R. A. SMITH.

There are some incidents and circumstances connected with the Spirit Lake Expedition which, so far as I know, have never been printed, and which, while not as dramatic as those heretofore related, are equally as essential to a proper understanding of the events therein described. Mr. Duncombe, in his paper,<sup>1</sup> says that information of the destruction of the settlements around Spirit Lake was brought to Fort Dodge by O. C. Howe, afterwards law professor in our State University and a companion, R. U. Wheelock; also another gentleman whose name he thinks was Parmenter.

The party above mentioned, together with a man by the name of Snyder who had visited the lakes the fall before and determined to settle there, had gone up on the west side of the river with supplies, arriving there on the night of the 16th of March. Before reaching the lakes they lost their course. Night coming on and with it a storm when they were three or four miles out, they were obliged to abandon their wagon and supplies. They took off their wagon box with its load, and left it at the edge of a slough, then pushed on with their team.

They reached the settlement about midnight, and found everything in confusion and apparently deserted. They went into camp until daylight, when they made such an investiga-

<sup>1</sup>ANNALS OF IOWA, 3d ser., v. III, p. 495.

tion of matters as they were able. Then, for the first time, the fact became apparent that the entire settlement had been wiped out by a horrible Indian massacre. The party at once started for Fort Dodge, leaving their supplies where they had abandoned them on the prairies.

They arrived at Fort Dodge on the 21st of March, as stated by Mr. Duncombe, and I have nothing to add to the published accounts of the march to the lakes. Lieutenant Maxwell and Mr. Laughlin are the only men who assisted in burying the dead, and they have written out their recollections of what took place at that time. All other accounts are hearsay. Their accounts are correct so far as they go, yet they omit some things that are essential to a full understanding of all of the details of that event.

On the morning of the 3rd of April, when the work of the day was being planned, it was decided among other things to send a small party out to see if they could find the wagon which had been abandoned by Messrs. Howe and Wheelock on the prairie three weeks before, and if so, to bring in what provisions they could. This party consisted of Messrs. O. C. Howe, R. U. Wheelock, B. F. Parmenter and myself, and I think there was one more person in the party, whose name I do not now remember. We left the main body near the Howe cabin, and under the guidance of Mr. Wheelock we had no difficulty in finding the abandoned wagon. We took what we could conveniently carry of flour, pork, coffee, sugar and salt, and made our way back, reaching the main body again at the Mattocks' cabin between three and four o'clock in the afternoon. The supplies we brought were sufficient for the whole party that night and the next morning. I have often reflected on what our situation would have been had we failed to find the wagon or had some one else found it ahead of us and carried off the supplies. We had used up every particle we had brought with us from the Des Moines, and the situation would have been somewhat desperate.

When the work of the day was completed, the whole party went into camp at the rear of the Gardner cabin. Why they did not go inside, I have forgotten. The night was

misty and chilly, with some rain. The boys were busy early in the morning for they knew the trip before them was no "May-day" picnic.

As the morning advanced there were unmistakable indications of a coming storm. As a result of this, the sentiment was divided as to what was the best course to pursue. A majority of the company, including both Captain Johnson and Lieutenant Maxwell, were in favor of striking out at once with the view of reaching the Des Moines River at Hickey's Bend, which was about four miles southwest of Emmetsburg. They were totally ignorant of the country, a large portion of which was broken and sloughy at the best. The whole northwest portion of the State had been covered with from four to five feet of snow, and this was now melting. The difficulties in the way of traveling across the prairie, as was favored by the majority, and of making the proposed settlement, were appalling, and yet they would listen to no compromise.

A smaller number were in favor of waiting over a day or two until after the storm should pass, and then making the return trip by the same route they had come, by way of Emmet and Estherville and down the Des Moines river. Each party was determined to carry out its own plan. After breakfast, the Captain, seeing that there was no probability of the men coming to an agreement, ordered them to "fall in." The men were quickly in their places. His next order was, "All who are in favor of going across the prairie, and starting at once, advance three paces to the front. The rest stand fast." Sixteen stepped quickly to the front. Seven remained in their places. The names of these seven men were O. C. Howe, R. U. Wheelock, B. F. Parmenter, William Wilson, J. M. Thatcher, Asa Burtch and R. A. Smith.

Now that the question was settled, the party that had determined to stay took hold and assisted the others in their preparations. These were soon completed and they took their departure at once. They had gone but a short distance when Captain Johnson and Mr. Burkholder turned back to where Messrs. Howe, Wheelock and myself were standing, and urged

us by every argument they could think of to go with them. They urged that in all probability parties of savages were lurking in the groves and that as soon as the main party had left we would fall easy victims to an attack. On the other hand we urged them to stay with us until the storm was over and then go back by the same route we came. We were strongly determined on that one point. We would have started back with them then, had they consented to go by our route, but this they would not do. We also insisted that the danger to be apprehended from the coming storm was far greater than from the Indians.

After becoming satisfied that their efforts were useless, and that we were bound to stay, they shook hands with each of us, bade us "Good By", and started on the run to join their comrades. It was their last "Good By". We watched them out of sight, and then turned our attention to our own safety and comfort. We moved our camp into the cabin and then decided on our future course. The first thing to be done was to make another trip to the abandoned wagon for provisions, as we had baked up the last crumb of what we brought the day before, and had given it to those of our comrades who had started back. We started out at once and made the trip in as short a time as possible, and it was fortunate that we did so, for just before we reached the cabin on our return, the sudden change in the weather occurred which has been noticed by all of the writers who have written on this affair.

We hurried to the cabin as fast as possible, bringing provisions enough to last us two or three days. We next secured a supply of fuel and as Gardner's stove had been left in place, without having been disturbed by the Indians, we soon had a good fire going and proceeded to make ourselves comfortable as speedily as possible. This was Saturday afternoon. We spent the time from then until Monday morning in resting up, drying our clothes and cooking victuals for our return trip, little dreaming of the terrible sufferings which were being endured by our comrades who had started across the country for the Irish Colony, or that larger company who were having such a bitter experience on the banks of Cylinder

Creek. By Monday morning, everything was frozen solid, so that we could go where we pleased, and we started for Fort Dodge where we arrived in due time without incident or accident worthy of notice.

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### THE FIRST MONUMENT TO IOWA VALOR.

BY CHARLES ALDRICH.

The first effort to do honor to the memories of the hardy pioneers who volunteered in 1857 at Webster City to go to the relief of the settlers at Spirit Lake who had been attacked by the ruthless Sioux Indians, was undertaken by me in the summer of 1887. Having been a typesetter for many years, I came in one day from my farm and asked the proprietor of the *Webster City Freeman* to make up a stick the width of a sheet of old-fashioned letter paper, and give me a case.

He did so at once, and I then and there set the type for a brief petition to the county board of supervisors, praying for the appropriation of three hundred dollars with which to procure a tablet to the memory of the soldiers as above stated. When I had set the type, Mr. Hunter kindly had three or four copies of the petition printed. This was on a Saturday.

I first went to the banks and secured the signatures of all the bankers with two exceptions. After those of the bankers I secured the signatures of the leading merchants. Many of the leading farmers of the surrounding country were in town that day, and every one to whom I presented the petition signed it cheerfully. In this way I secured the endorsement of perhaps thirty or forty of the representative tax payers of the county.

Charles T. Fenton was chairman of the board of supervisors and read the petition. He remarked, "O, yes, we will grant that petition." His associates assented to the proposition. They then proceeded to appoint me as a committee to carry out the prayer of the petitioners. I objected to acting alone, but said I would be willing to do the work provided they would give me four or five associates.

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